

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 EA-09 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 INR-07 LAB-04

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FM AMEMBASSY SUVA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6300

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SUVA 0864

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, FJ

SUBJECT: FIJI DOCK STRIKE

REF: SUVA 0858

1. EMOTIONS ARE RUNNING HIGH IN FIJI AS WE BEAR THE END OF THE SECOND WEEK OF THE DOCKWORKERS STRIKE. THE INCIDENT AT LAUTOKA PORT INVOLVING THE CREW OF THE NEW ZEALAND SHIP NGAHERE (SEE REFTTEL) WHO BATTLED POLICE BEFORE SUCCUMBING TO TEAR GAS, HAS UNDERSCORBED THE POSSIBILITY THAT VIOLENT ACTION MAY ACCOMPANY ANY FURTHER MOVES TO BREAK THE STRIKE. THE FIJI GOVERNMENT HAS FINALLY PRESSED CHARGES ON DOCKWORKERS' LEADER TANIELA VEITATA AND OFFICERS OF THE UNION FOR ENGAGING IN AN ILLEGAL STRIKE. THE FIRST HEARING ON THE CHARGES WILL TAKE PLACE JULY 18, THE SAME DAY THAT THE SEAMEN ARRESTED IN LAUTOKA WILL HAVE THEIR DAY IN COURT.

2. WHETHER BY ACCIDENT OR DESIGN THE FIJI GOVERNMENT HAS MANAGED TO DIRECT THE PUBLIC'S WRATH AT THE
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AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND LABOR UNIONS WHICH ARE SUPPORTING THE STRIKE. DESPITE THE PRIME MINISTER'S APPEALS, HOWEVER, THE STRIKE ACTION HAS BEEN VERY EFFECTIVE. THE GOVERNMENT IS ATTEMPTING TO KEEP THE PORTS OPEN BY USING VMLUNTEER LABOR, BUT NO SHIPS HAVE BEEN WILLING TO COME INTO LR LEAVE THE PORTS IN FEAR THAT THEIR COMPANIES WILL BE BLACKLISTED BY THE

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND DOCKERS. CONSEQUENTLY SHIPS CARRYING VITAL SUPPLIES HAVE BEEN DIVERTED TO OTHER PORTS IN THE PACIFIC, AND SHIPPING AGENTS AND CONSIGNEES WILL HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME LOCATING THE MISDIRECTED CARGOES ONCE THE STRIKE IS CONCLUDED. EMBASSY IS TOLD BY AGENT FOR BRITISH SHIP FREMANTLE STAR THAT SHE WILL ARRIVE IN SUVA HARBOR ON SCHEDULE JULY 16 AND REMAIN OFFSHORE UNTIL THE FOLLOWING WEDNESDAY IF NECESSARY IN HOPES THAT SITUATION WILL IMPROVE AND CARGO CAN BE UNLOADED. (EMBASSADOR'S

HHE ARE ON BOARD.)

3. ONE FAVORABLE SIGN IS THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TO WHICH THE DOCKWORKERS UNION IS AFFILIATED) HAS DISASSOCIATED HIMSELF FROM THE STRIKE. THAT IS LIKELY TO PREVENT OTHER FIJI UNIONS FROM STAGING SYMPATHY STRIKES IN SUPPORT OF THE DOCKWORKERS. THE LAST MAJOR DOCK STRIKE IN FIJI (IN 171) LASTED SIX WEEKS AND CAUSED EXTREME HARDSHIP, PARTICULARLY IN THE OUTER ISLANDS. WE ARE HOPING THAT THIS STRIKE WILL NOT GO BEYOND A THIRD WEEK.

4. THE FIJI GOVERNMENT HAS SUGGESTED TO LOCAL MERCHANTS THAT THEY SEEK OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPLY APART FROM AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND FROM COUNTRIES WHERE LABOR

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UNIONS WILL NOT INTERFERE WITH FIJI'S DOMESTIC LABOR SITUATION. AMONG THOSE MENTIONED AS POSSIBLE ALTERNATE SOURCES OF MERCHANDISE WERE THE U.S., JAPAN AND GERMANY. WE HAVE OFFERED OUR ASSISTANCE TO THE FIJI MINISTRY OF COMMERCE FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO MAKE CONTACT WITH AMERICAN SUPPLIERS. THE PRC EMBASSY HAS ALSO GOTTEN INTO THE ACT. AMBASSADOR MI CALLED ON THE PRIME MINISTER JULY 14 TO SUGGEST THAT FIJI LOOK TOWARD CHINA AS A SOURCE OF SUPPLIES. THE PROBLEM, AS THE PERMANENT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE STATES, IS NOT ONLY TO OVERCOME THE PRESENT STRIKE BUT TO LOOK FOR LONG TERM SOLUTIONS TO FIJI'S PRESENT DEPENDENCY ON AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND SUPPLIERS. FLANEGIN

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